

The Advertiser

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 31, 1896.

THE HOSPITAL AGAIN.

THE failure of the negotiations for the settlement of the long-standing Hospital dispute is a bitter disappointment. There is no doubt that the general public is heartily sick of the whole miserable business, and would gladly have welcomed an amicable arrangement for the termination of dissension. The spirit in which the negotiations were opened and continued was creditable to all parties. There was no desire on the part of the Government except for peace with honor. A temper of conciliation full of hopeful augury was displayed on the other side by several gentlemen holding prominent positions in the medical profession. The general interests of social tranquillity and of good feeling between different classes, as well as the special interests of the Hospital and of the Medical School, have become so deeply involved that there has been a consensus of opinion in favor of the desirableness of ending strife and restoring friendly relations all round. Recognising these facts leading citizens have willingly made their services available as mediators. It is an open secret that the Chancellor of the University labored hard to bring about a settlement—unfortunately without satisfactory result. Parliament suspended political controversy on the Hospital question under the stimulus of a common hope that all differences would be peaceably arranged. But the aspiration by which so many have been animated could not be fulfilled. It is plain that the obstacle is the divided state of opinion among members of the medical profession. The late honorary staff have not been unanimous, and, if they had been, unanimity might have been unavailing without the support of the outside body. The situation appears to some to require more than it does to others. If certain members of the medical profession felt themselves quite free to act

absolutely on their own judgment of the requirements of the case, the Hospital trouble would speedily be at an end, or if the dispute continued it would lose its public character and become purely a private controversy.

It is a rather curious and significant fact that the original cause of the trouble

has been entirely overshadowed by the later developments involving the new doctors and their antagonists. The old difficulty has hardly counted at all in the late negotiations. And the new difficulties are not, and never have been, insuperable, provided always that their solution rested with individuals, and not with organised bodies or the strong influences emanating from them. That the Government proposed no terms that were in the least degree preposterous may be fairly concluded from their practical acceptance by gentlemen who personally are the soul of honor and incapable of lending their sanction to an arrangement that would outrage justice or sacrifice the public interest. If these gentlemen do not go back to the Hospital, it is not because they think it would be wrong to do so, but because professionally they are overruled by colleagues whose idea is that of stringing out the dispute in another and quite unnecessary direction. As was shown at the meeting of the Hospital Board yesterday, the basis of settlement proposed by the Government has been revealed in a distorted form, but still with a sufficient degree of accuracy to show its general moderation and reasonableness. On these conditions a number of highly competent practitioners, if perfectly free to act, would have been willing to re-enter the Hospital service. That fact speaks volumes in itself, and is a remarkable commentary on the resolution of the local medical society, which has put an end to the negotiation. The profession of anxiety to assist in the settlement of difficulty is ill borne out by the demand for creating a new difficulty and a still more embittered dispute. The assertion of the impossibility of working amicably with the new doctors until certain charges are investigated is open to two objections. First, those charges have been enquired into already; secondly, the proposal for a re-trial suggests a desire to convict, or at least, appears to express a strong doubt of the justice of the previous verdict, which is scarcely a good preparation for working amicably with the gentlemen accused. But this cry for further investigation is irrational.

The idea is to limit enquiry to the case of gentlemen who have had the misfortune to come under a professional boycott. That would not be fair. Medical competency is relative, not absolute. To do the new doctors and their work justice, they would have to be put in comparison with their predecessors, and so the investigation should go back to other operations and modes of medical treatment than those which, in the peculiar